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ABSTRACT

Results from a previous experiment relating sex role typing to verbal nonassertiveness are reviewed in this paper in light of other findings in the sex role literature. The first conclusion offered by the review suggests that, with respect to speech behavior, the expected correspondence between androgynous behavior and sex role typing requires considerable qualification. It is argued that feminine and androgynous sex role typed individuals respond in qualitatively different ways to social cues in a conversational situation: feminine typed subjects respond primarily to overall social cues residing in the situation whereas androgynous typed subjects respond primarily to the social characteristics of the interlocutor. The second conclusion offered by the review suggests that previous demonstrations of the correspondence between androgynous sex role typing and behavioral flexibility are artifactual. Evidence is presented for accepting the possibility that the current definition of androgyny as a combination of high masculinity and high femininity is more a measure of an individual's general activity level than of an individual's sex role orientation. (Author/FL)

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With Regard to Speakers, High Masculinity and High Femininity is not Androgyny

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With Respect to Speakers, High Masculinity and

High Femininity is not Androgyny

The theoretical basis for current sex role typologies

Constantinople's (1973) criticism of bipolar masculinity-femininity scales was followed by proposals by several investigators for separate, uncorrelated masculinity and femininity scales. The two most popular of these pairs of scales were those of Bem (1974) and Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1974), which recently were the subject of considerable debate and criticism (Bem, 1979; Locksley & Colten, 1979; Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979; Spence & Helmreich, 1979; Strahan, 1975).

In addition to the claim that masculinity and femininity are independently assessable self-concepts, recent formulations of sex roles have included the following assumptions (Kelly & Worell, 1977): 1) Masculinity is defined as encompassing an instrumental orientation, goal directedness and a need to see every task to completion, whereas femininity is defined as encompassing expressiveness, communalism and a concern for the affective relations between oneself and others. (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Bem, in press; Parsons & Bales, 1955), 2) Androgyny is assessed psychometrically by the conjoint application of separate and uncorrelated masculinity and femininity scales, and 3) The psychometric categories, masculinity, femininity and androgyny, are presumed to correspond to distinct behavioral orientations. Sex-appropriate sex role-typed individuals are thought to have their behavioral options limited to behaviors traditionally associated with

the respective sexes. Androgynous sex role-typed individuals are assumed to be able to engage in cross-sex-typed behavior when it is situationally expedient to do so[1].

The most popular procedure used now for the determination of individuals' sex role types require that a four quadrant sex role typology be constructed (Kelly & Worell, 1977). Typically, the researcher first obtains masculinity and femininity scores on a standardized instrument from members of a given sample. The range of scores obtained is then split at the median for each of the two scales. Subjects with scores above the median on either scale are then designated, respectively, as high-masculine and high-feminine. Those scoring below the median on either scale are classified, respectively, as low-masculine and low-feminine. These preliminary classifications are then used to assign the subjects to one of four sex role types. These sex role types are: androgynous (high-masculine, high-feminine), feminine (low masculine, high-feminine), masculine (high masculine, low feminine), and undifferentiated (low-masculine, low feminine).

Prior research on sex role typing and speech behavior

The only previous experimental attempt known to us in which researchers investigated the effects of sex role

1. Spence and Helmreich (Spence & Helmreich, 1979; Helmreich, Spence & Holahan,1979) now dissent from these assumptions. They argue on theoretical and empirical grounds that all current masculinity and femininity scales measure personality traits, not sex role orientation.

self-concept on verbal behavior was reported in a recent article by Ickes and Barnes (1978). They used the Bem Sex Role Inventory to classify subjects' sex role types. They then selected from a large pool of previously classified subjects only those subjects who were either androgynous-typed or whose sex role type corresponded to their gender. The principal hypothesis tested was that mixed sex dyads that included at least one androgynous member would experience significantly more social interaction and positive affect than mixed sex dyads consisting of stereotypically sex-typed subjects. This hypothesis was tested in an unstructured waiting room situation.

Their results confirmed their hypothesis and, in their opinion, buttressed the view that androgynous sex role-typed individuals are socially more adept than conventionally sex role-typed individuals (e.g., Bem, in press; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna & Watson, 1976). Androgynous sex role-typed individuals were expected to be more socially competent because they could draw from a larger repertoire of social behaviors (i.e., behaviors typically associated with one sex or the other) to maintain social interactions than could feminine or masculine sex role-typed individuals.

Our experiment on sex role typing and verbal nonassertiveness

We conducted an experiment that paralleled that of Ickes and Barnes in some respects, but which was also different in two crucial ways. First, we used a situational manipulation that permitted us to define the mixed sex social situations

as expressive or instrumental. Second, our discussion situation was much more structured than Ickes and Barnes' waiting room situation insofar as we directed the subjects to talk about particular topics at specific intervals.

We had two goals in mind when we conducted our experiment. Our major goal was to demonstrate the functional equivalence of personality sex role typing and biological gender in determining (in the general case only) a person's likely level of verbal nonassertiveness. Gender had already been demonstrated to be related to a variety of operationalizations of verbal nonassertiveness (e.g., Aries; 1976, Brouwer, Gerritsen, & de Haan, 1979; Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; Edelsky, 1979; Swacker, 1975; Zimmerman & West, 1975). Our experiment did succeed in showing that sex role self-concept had an effect similar to that of gender on verbal nonassertiveness. This issue is not the subject of this paper and will not be further discussed.

Our second goal was to test, for speech behavior, Bem's (Bem, 1975) assertion that androgynous sex role-typed subjects would be more adept at responding appropriately to instrumental or expressive cues in a situation than feminine or masculine sex-typed subjects. This second issue is the focus of this paper.

We administered both the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974) to an initial sample of 48 female and 48 male undergraduates. From this sample we selected 52 subjects

(36 of each sex) whose sex role type assignment had been the same for both sex role questionnaires. The double classification was used to eliminate the error idiosyncratic to each of the two sex role questionnaires (see Webb, Campbell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 1966), and to be able to conduct a more sensitive analysis of the impact of sex role self-concept on verbal nonassertiveness.

Our measure of verbal nonassertiveness was taken from Crosby and Nyquist's (1977) operationalization of Lakoff's "female language" (1973). The markers for nonassertive speech included: a) tag questions, b) hedges (e.g., "I don't know, but...", "I guess", "maybe"), c) empty adjectives (e.g., "divine", "fabulous"), and d) the intensive "so". The measure consisted of, first, summing the frequency of these characteristics in a central six-minute portion of the subjects' discussion about a social dilemma, and then dividing that sum by the number of words spoken. Dividing by the number of words spoken corrected for individual differences in speech rate and "floor time". The nonassertiveness score was obtained by scoring from unlabeled transcripts. This was effective in keeping coders blind to the sex of the speakers.

Our findings surprised us. They failed to replicate the findings of Ickes and Barnes (1978), Bem & Lenney (1976), Bem, Martyna, & Watson (1976) and Orlofsky & Windle (1978). We found that the androgynous sex role-typed subjects were not significantly more responsive to the expressive or instrumental

nature of the discussion situation than masculine or feminine sex role-typed subjects. We did, however, obtain the significant sex role type by discussion situation interaction that had been anticipated ($F(3,37) = 4.97$, $p < .05$). Simple main effect analyses showed that it was the feminine-typed subjects, not the androgynous ones, who were most situationally adaptive. For the androgynous-typed subjects, in fact, there was a non-significant reversal of the expected pattern showing the androgynous-typed subjects to be more assertive in the expressive situation and less assertive in the instrumental situation. This pattern was completely contrary to our hypothesis (see figure 1).

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figure 1 here

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While this result dismayed us, we took some consolation in the realization that it confirmed once again the functional equivalence of personality sex role typing and gender. In particular, one could say that this result confirmed for feminine-typed subjects what had already been demonstrated to be true for women: namely, that women shape their verbal responses to conform to the demands of the social situation to a markedly greater degree than men do (e.g., Giles & Powesland, 1975; Labov, 1972; Pilkonis, 1977).

Having coped with this first surprise, we found ourselves confronted by an even more unexpected finding, one that left us

momentarily in a serious theoretical quandary. Our data yielded a totally unexpected significant sex role type by gender interaction ($F(3,37) = 3.45$, $p < .05$) (see figure 2). Only one significant simple main effect was obtained from an analysis of this effect. We found that androgynous females were more verbally nonassertive than androgynous males. More importantly, inspection of the means revealed that the androgynous females were the most verbally nonassertive of all the cells and that the androgynous-typed males were the least nonassertive of all the cells. These data suggested that, rather than behaving in the situationally most appropriate manner of the four sex role types, the androgynous speakers were the ones who most slavishly conformed to the speech roles traditionally descriptive of men and women.

A first explanation for our results

Fortunately, we found a theoretically appealing explanation that can parsimoniously explain not only the two surprising results we obtained, but also the results of Bem and her colleagues, and the results of Ickes and Barnes. This explanation involves the assumption that androgynous subjects aggressively respond to only the most salient cues in their social environment. It must be further assumed that a personal characteristic of interaction partners such as gender will usually constitute a more salient social cue than any cues latent in the situation.

Now let us consider the data from these experiments. In the two Bem et al. experiments (Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna,

& Watson), only situational cues were present. The androgynous-typed subjects did not converse with another subject during the data collection period of these experiments. They, therefore, could use their putative flexibility only in the service of responding appropriately to situational cues. Under these conditions androgynous-typed subjects responded to different social cues in the situation more consistently than did conventional sex role-typed subjects.

In contrast to the Bem et al. experiments, Ickes and Barnes' experiment (1978) involved no manipulation of situational cues. Their unstructured waiting room situation left no alternative to the subjects but to respond (or fail to respond) to the personal social characteristics of the waiting room partner. Again, androgynous subjects responded appropriately more consistently than did conventional sex role-typed subjects.

Finally, in contrast to both of these sets of experiments, our experiment involved both a situational manipulation and opposite-sex interlocutors. The androgynous-typed subjects in our experiment resolved the implicit competing demands of social cues residing in the situation and social cues inherent in characteristics of their interlocutor by responding primarily to the latter. The androgynous-typed subjects proved to be more responsive to their interlocutors' gender than the other sex role-typed subjects were. Androgynous-typed males spoke the most assertively to their female interlocutors; androgynous-typed females spoke the least assertively to their male interlocutors.

The contrasting, relative nonresponsiveness of our androgynous sex-typed subjects to our situational manipulation suggested that their responsiveness to the situation was overwhelmed by their greater responsiveness to their interlocutor.

This evidence suggests that we can still assert that androgynous individuals are behaviorally more flexible than other types, but that such flexibility is likely to be used to respond differentially to social characteristics of people in a situation first, and to respond differentially to characteristics of the situation only secondarily.

Our data also suggest that feminine sex-typed subjects, in contrast to androgynous sex-typed subjects, choose to ignore a salient social characteristic of their interlocutor (gender, in this case) in preference to responding as appropriately as possible to the social demands of the situation. Of the four sets of sex role-typed subjects, the feminine sex-typed subjects were the only ones to significantly alter their verbal behavior to accommodate the expressive or instrumental nature of the situation.

The overall impression we get from the literature and from our reading of our data is that feminine sex-typed individuals actively avoid implicit commitments of interest in a strange interlocutor. They do this by responding maximally to implicit demands of the social situation in which the conversation with the unfamiliar interlocutor takes place. Where such a social situation is unstructured or nondescript, as was the case in

Ickes and Barnes' (1978) experiment, feminine sex-typed subjects simply avoid any conversation.

A second explanation for our results

Let us return, now, to the surprising, significant sex role by gender interaction (see figure 2). A second explanation for this result suggests itself, especially in light of other research findings in the sex role literature. The following plausible explanation has serious methodological implications for the validity of current operational definitions of androgyny. This alternative explanation involves interpreting the current operational definition of androgyny as actually a measure of individuals' general activity level.

Spence and Helmreich (1978, 1979; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) have long noted a characteristic ordering of sex-typed subjects along a self-esteem scale. In terms of decreasing self-esteem, the sex role types arrange themselves consistently along the following gradient: androgyny greater than masculinity, masculinity greater than femininity, femininity greater than undifferentiated (i.e., androgyny > masculinity > femininity > undifferentiated). This characteristic gradient, with occasional transpositions of the feminine and undifferentiated sex role types, can be found very consistently in the sex role literature and in our own data. Our reading of the literature and interpretation of our data lead us to view this gradient, not as an accidental correlate of self-esteem, but as a substantive measure of arousal that follows necessarily as a consequence

of the current operational definition of androgyny.

The current operational definition of androgyny requires that subjects score high on both of two, theoretically independent personality scales. These scales are composed exclusively of socially desirable traits. Consequently, the difference between high scorers and low scorers on these scales may be more a difference of degree in the enthusiasm with which they endorse positive traits in themselves than a qualitative difference in their sex role self-concepts.

It was the markedly bilinear shape of our sex role by gender interaction that first alerted us to the possibility that our assessment of androgyny might actually constitute a measure of arousal. We found that the mean nonassertiveness scores for female subjects <u>increased</u> linearly along the undifferentiated to feminine to masculine to androgynous gradient. By contrast, the mean nonassertiveness scores for male subjects <u>decreased</u> linearly along exactly the same gradient (see figure 2). A post hoc linear by linear contrast ($F(1,37) = 11.49$, $p < .05$) validated this pattern.

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figure 2 here

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Such a pattern of results resembles findings relating to phenomena thought to be mediated by arousal. For instance, in the study of human crowding, researchers found that the arousal engendered by intensive crowding simultaneously

increased women's affiliativeness while it decreased that of men by increasing their competitiveness (Freedman, Levy, Buchanan, & Price, 1972). Similarly, females appear to express increased verbal nonassertiveness in direct relation to the sheer number of adjectives endorsed by them on the BSRI and the PAQ. And males appear to express decreased verbal nonassertiveness with higher masculinity and femininity scores. Thus, it is possible that the pattern of verbal nonassertiveness scores that we obtained reflects the influence of an undesired component of the sex role questionnaires; namely, a measure of general activity level.

Additional evidence for viewing this undifferentiated to feminine to masculine to androgynous gradient as an artifactual activity level gradient can be found in recent experiments reported by Runge and Helmreich (1979) and by Orlofsky (1979). Runge and Helmreich conducted a survey of individuals' leisure activities and collected sex role self-concept data on the same individuals. They found that, in terms of the number of hobbies actively pursued, androgynous individuals reported the highest number, masculine types were next, followed by feminine types and undifferentiated types, who reported involvement with the fewest number of hobbies. With respect to the active pursuit of sports, the same gradient obtained except for a switched ordering of undifferentiated and feminine individuals' means. Orlofsky (1979) found that when individuals, whose sex role type was known, were asked to use the Bem Sex Role Inventory to describe their ideal dating partner or ideal spouse, the

subjects' scores generally followed the androgyny to undifferentiated gradient. For example, it was androgynous subjects who reported the highest masculinity and highest femininity scores as desireable in their ideal dating partner, as compared to the other sex-typed subjects. And it was the undifferentiated sex-typed subjects who reported the lowest masculinity and lowest femininity scores for their ideal dating partner.

The significance of viewing the self-esteem gradient as an artifactual activity level gradient is that the results of studies that sought to behaviorally validate the concept of androgyny can be explained, in part, in terms of artifactual categorizations of people according to their chronic activity level. For instance, when Bem reanalyzed her validation data to distinguish undifferentiated and androgynous types (Bem, 1977), the reported variation in female subjects' responsiveness to a kitten paralleled the familiar self-esteem gradient --despite the fact that the feminine-typed female subjects were expected to be the most responsive to the kitten. Androgynous-typed subjects played with the kitten the most, feminine and undifferentiated sex-typed subjects played with it the least. A reanalysis of the results of Bem's conformity task also showed that females' demonstrated levels of independence followed the same gradient, except for a switched ordering of feminine and undifferentiated mean values. Ickes and Barnes' results could also be parsimoniously explained by supposing that androgynous types, because of their

chronically high activity levels, are less likely than masculine and feminine sex role types to tolerate silence or inactivity in an unstructured social situation.

The general pattern of these results across such a wide range of behaviors argues strongly for the mediation of the most basic psychological continuum: that of physiological arousal or activity level. Attributing the pattern of these results to the mediation of self-esteem, as Spence and Helmreich would probably do, would be difficult to justify for all cases.

Summary

In sum, this review of the literature on the validation of the androgyny sex role self-concept suggests two plausible conclusions, at least with respect to language behavior. The first requires the assumption that the current operational definition of androgyny is correct. Given this assumption, it appears that the behavioral flexibility of androgyny sex role typed individuals leads to maximal responsiveness to salient social characteristics of an interlocutor, primarily, and only secondarily, to social cues residing in the situation. If no interlocutor is present, then androgynous-typed subjects respond maximally, of all sex role-typed subjects, to social cues in the situation. Feminine-typed subjects, on the other hand, respond sensitively to salient situational cues when an unfamiliar interlocutor is present; their speech behavior appears not to be measurably influenced by the social characteristics

of their interlocutor.

The second plausible conclusion compelled us to question the validity of the current operational definition of androgyny with respect to its role in verbal behavior. Patterns of data found in our own experiment and found elsewhere in the sex role literature suggest that the psychometric characteristics of the two currently most popular sex role questionnaires are such that the conjoint use of the theoretically independent masculinity and femininity scales is more a measure of general activity level than of qualitative sex role orientation.

We conclude that Bem's original description of androgyny is, with respect to speech behavior at least, at best incomplete and at worst inaccurate. The simple notion that androgynous sex role-typed individuals can flexibly call on either typically feminine or typically masculine behaviors --as the situation warrants-- does not apply to conversational situations without considerable qualification. Assuming that the assessment of androgyny is valid and practicable, a clearer conception of the behavioral flexibility of androgynous-typed individuals is needed. In particular, the relative importance of situational and interlocutor-related social cues in eliciting such flexible behavior must be determined in future attempts to relate androgyny to speech behavior.

Before there is any attempt at empirical clarification of the behavioral flexibility associated with androgyny, however, there must be more convincing construct validation of the

current methods for assessing androgyny. The first priority has to be to make certain that it is androgyny that is being measured, not some other psychological trait.

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Title page footnotes

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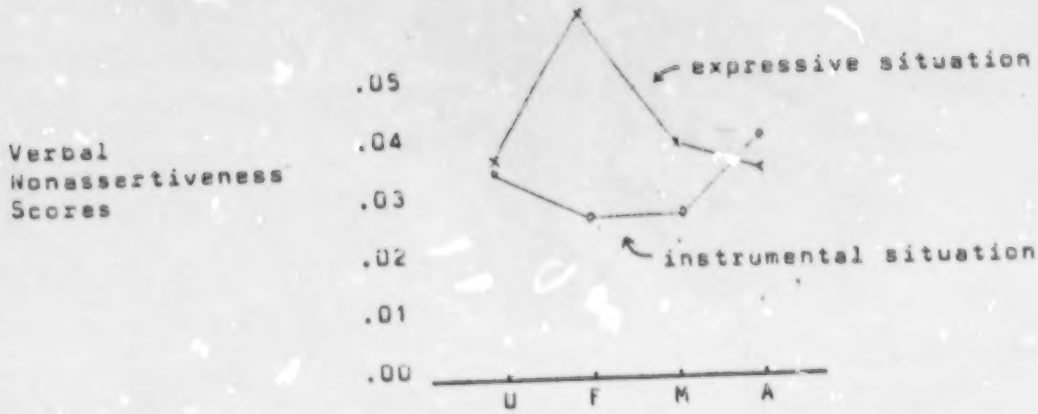

Figure 1. Distribution of mean verbal nonassertiveness scores for each of four sex role types, as a function of the discussion situation.
Note. U=undifferentiated, F=feminine, M=masculine, A=androgyncus.

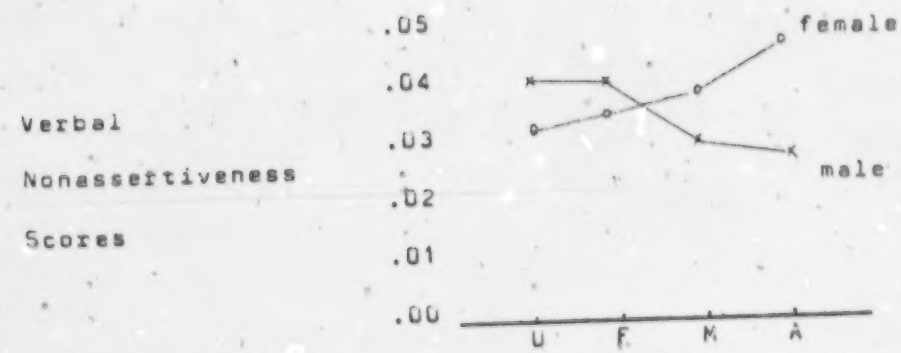

Figure 2. Distribution of mean verbal nonassertiveness scores for each of four sex role types, as a function of the speaker's gender.
Note. U=uncifferentiated, F=feminine, M=masculine, A=androgynous.